

PD-ABP-208
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FINAL REPORT

PROJECT # 180-0032

**STREET CHILDREN ALBANIA PROJECT
"SHEFT"**

**U.S. AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
COOPERATIVE AGREEMENT NO. EUR-0032-A-00-4024-00**

July 1997

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Acknowledgments:

This project was administered by Childhope International. Childhope UK provided assistance in facilitating the delivery of project services and financial resources. Special thanks is noted for the support and interest of Mary Lee McIntyre, USAID Project Officer, ENI/HR/EHA.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A. Background

Since the beginning of the democratization process in Central and Eastern Europe, there has been clear evidence that the social costs have been considerable. Some of the social problems were inherited from the previous regimes, and some have been a direct result of the turbulent period of reform. Albania has a population of 3.4 million people. Nearly half of the population is under the age of 26 and over one million citizens are under the age of 16. Tirana has a population of over 350,000, which is growing rapidly. There is high unemployment countrywide, and perhaps half a million people are without work and dependent on declining state subsidies. There are many children who find it difficult to enter state education, health care provision is inadequate and housing supply no longer meets the growing demand.

In an initial period from 1992 to early 1994, when street children were first obvious on the streets of Tirana, most were involved in begging. The main areas where the children were present were to be found around the two or three hotels catering to foreigners. The average amount of money earned in a day by a begging child could be as much as \$5.00, which exceeded an average adult salary. Any money earned by the children went directly to support their families.

The ages of the children ranged from five years to 14 years. There were more street girls than one generally would find in other countries in this region. Many of the street children came from a Gypsy background. Tirana's street children also suffered from common diseases of neglect -- malnutrition and skin and respiratory ailments. Public washing and toilet facilities were not readily available in Tirana, although there were a few parks and lakes which the children used to wash.

Albania, the smallest and most isolated country within the region, exemplified the social upheavals, especially in the emergence of children on the streets in the major cities. In an effort to determine the root causes of this problem, Childhope conducted a brief analysis in 1992 in Tirana, Albania. Some of the following factors were noted for the numbers of children on the streets:

- The erosion of the resource base of the family
- The drop in household income and savings
- The decline in public spending for health, education, child-welfare and other social services
- The implications of a "freer" or market economy

There were certain social groups in Albania that were more clearly disadvantaged than others. However, the children on the streets were from a cross-section of social groups, and they were on the streets primarily to earn money to supplement the subsistence levels of their families. At that time, the number of children on the street was estimated to be 150. Today, the number of children on the street has more than doubled.

As noted, the turmoil within Albania, as it struggled from decades of isolation and deprivation, left social services at a standstill. The needs of the children on the streets were not being met at any level. There were no options for primary health care or basic education. Their families were depending on them for financial assistance and, therefore, the children had to work in menial and sometimes dangerous situations for long hours every day. There were few resources available to address the problems of street children in Albania. Very little knowledge existed on the specific needs of street children or their families. The experience to implement programs did not exist, and cooperation and coordination among NGOs in Albania was yet to be established.

With initial assistance from the European Union and British charities, a modest project was opened by Childhope in Tirana in 1992 for street children. The main element of the project, which was called SHEFT, was a day-care center for the street children. It provided basic services, like bathroom facilities, meals and recreation. The center also provided the children with a safe environment from the streets.

In 1994, Childhope received a three-year grant from the U.S. Agency for International Development, Office of Emergency Humanitarian Assistance, Bureau for Europe and the New Independent States, to expand the services of SHEFT.

B. SHEFT /The Program

With funding from USAID, SHEFT was expanded with the intention to include several levels of programming. However, there was also the reality that there were limited numbers of trained Albanian professionals or volunteers with the skills needed to staff the project. Therefore, one of the objectives of SHEFT was to create an **NGO forum**, linked with the Ministries of Health, Education, Social Protection and Justice. This forum would work together to build capacity and cooperation, both in the governmental and non-governmental sectors. Initially, it was felt that such a forum would be effective in lobbying the Albanian government to enact child-care legislation as the country settled into its effort to create a new democracy. It was also meant to unite the NGOs in their concerted efforts to assist children in especially difficult circumstances.

Some of the elements proposed by Childhope to be included in the NGO forum's activities would be the training and implementation among the organizations of:

- Vocational guidance
- Self-esteem counseling
- Communication skills
- Family support services
- Treatment/prevention of child and sexual abuse
- Policy formulation for child care services
- Casework management and practice
- Drug abuse prevention and education
- Street outreach service

SHEFT also proposed a program of **income generation** into its activities. Although most of the children who worked on the street were very young (5-14 years), their families depended on their income for economic viability. Therefore, SHEFT considered less dangerous and more productive ways for the children to earn money. Initially, the plan was to help the children learn a trade by becoming apprentices. The possibility of creating work co-ops for the children was part of the income generation plan, noting that in many other countries, street children's work co-ops had been very successful. The co-ops would also assist the children in managing their work activities within the community and providing them with a means to safe-guard their earnings. However, any work program for the children would have to consider the high unemployment rate in Albania at that time.

Included in the funding from USAID was an expanded **educational program**. Many of the children who came to SHEFT no longer went to school. As street children, it was certain the local schools would reject them because of their situation. Their previous educational opportunities were primitive. To overcome this problem, SHEFT planned to provide a program of basic literacy and math skills. Along with this, the program would provide opportunities to the children for recreational and cultural activities, as well as arts and crafts and theater. The intent was to prepare the children to enter or re-enter the formal school system.

The health problems of the children who came to SHEFT were many and diverse. They were vulnerable to a large range of preventable and communicable diseases. With this additional funding from USAID, a **primary health-care program** was planned, which included dental care. A doctor and/or nurse would be hired to come to the center on a regular basis to treat the most common illnesses of the children. The medical personnel would also be available to accompany the sicker children to a clinic or a hospital. The very special health needs of the girls who came to SHEFT would be a major component of the health program.

To meet the management and professional needs of SHEFT, a plan to do **staff and management training** was formulated. In Albania there were few alternatives to institutional care for children. Street children required non-institutional programming, usually based on the theory of street outreach and street education. To provide the SHEFT staff with these skills, a training program was devised which included:

- Counseling techniques
- Casework management
- Addressing the special needs of girls
- Family support services
- Provision of activities for play and leisure

For the management team at SHEFT, training included:

- Defining the mission and establishing goals
- Recruitment and staff support
- Financial management and reporting techniques
- Decision making and performance measurement
- Public awareness and community relationships

Since SHEFT was the first outreach program for street children to be implemented in Albania, the results of its efforts to work with street children were extremely important for future project replication in the country. The response of the children to the programs of health, education and income generation, as well as the competency of management and staff, would all be critical in maintaining the project and modeling it in other Albanian cities. SHEFT would also work within the community to gain acceptance of the children, regardless of their circumstances. Many of the children who were among those who came to SHEFT were ROMA, or Gypsy children. This made them twice as vulnerable to discrimination and violence.

PROJECT EVALUATION

The three-year USAID grant expired in March of 1997. SHEFT had attempted to incorporate all elements of the original plan for expansion within the project and the community. Certain changes within Albania were occurring that were not anticipated when the project proposal was submitted for funding. For instance, state sector salaries increased by 30%; the bread subsidy was reduced by 50%; gasoline prices increased by 18%. Adjustments were made to the objectives and to the budget of the program. Plans to create an NGO forum and integrate the community into the project were delayed and then deleted. About mid-term in the grant, a more realistic set of objectives were submitted, based on the changing and difficult environment in Albania. For the programming, health and education became the primary program elements. Management and staff enhancement continued, but on a lesser level.

Perhaps the most drastic change occurring in Albania at that time was the rapid rise in inflation. Also, the government-adjusted salary scales made the original salary budget for personnel severely underfunded. Over the three years of the grant, a major portion of the USAUD funds had to go into staff salaries. At full staff, the project included:

- The Director
- Deputy Director
- 4 Educators
- 1 Part-time Doctor
- 2 Cleaners
- 1 Social Worker
- 1 Guard/driver
- 1 Cook

With inflation, the cost of essential items – food, program supplies, repairs and up-keep – also increased dramatically. Since the project was funded in U.S. dollars, the grant income suffered from the falling purchasing power of the dollar in Albania.

In addition to inflation, currency devaluation, governmental salary adjustments and increases (state instigated minimum salary levels), the project had to cover the unanticipated cost of renting a school bus to take children to school --when they became eligible -- and to get them back and forth to SHEFT, because they were unable to afford public transportation. Without the bus, the children could not come to the project or get to school. The result would be their inevitable return to the streets.

Originally, SHEFT was meant to “complement” the existing services for street children in Tirana. However, SHEFT became the focal point for this population, and, eventually, the only program of its kind in Tirana. The existing institutional establishments, like schools and orphanages, were understaffed and couldn't cope with the growing numbers of children in difficult circumstances. The governmental agencies and ministries assigned to the care of children did not have the resources to support services for these children. The local NGOs were also unable to provide critical programming for children and youth.

EVALUATION OF SHEFT - MARCH 1994 - MARCH 1997

In spite of working in one of the most precarious and fragile of democracies in the region, SHEFT was able to be effective in providing services to street children from the most disadvantaged homes in the capital of Tirana. The program elements within SHEFT have evolved from an initial experimental basis to one where there are tried and tested methodologies for working with this group of children. There have been remarkable and positive changes in the children's behavior and their academic achievements. This is due to a committed staff, which continues to be entirely Albanian.

SHEFT provided much-needed basic and essential services to the children who came to the center. The children received three meals each day plus a late afternoon snack, a place to shower and wash their clothes, and the use of toilets - a luxury they did not have on the streets or at home. Clothing was also provided if it was needed by the children.

The staff of SHEFT helped the children establish a daily routine each day, which included: story telling, singing, games and reading and writing skills. On certain days, the families of the children were invited to the center to observe their children and to encourage the families to continue their support of the center. Some of the families were receiving small financial stipends - about \$50.00 a month -- to replace the loss of income from the children's work on the street. Funds for these stipends, which helped to support 35 families, were coming from a sponsorship plan located in Brussels.

All children who came to SHEFT were provided with some level of primary health care services. For most of the three years of the USAID grant, there was a medical professional available to the children. Because of the severe conditions of their lives on the street and at home, the children suffered a number of health problems, but the health care services at SHEFT did make a difference. For instance, during an outbreak of cholera in 1994, SHEFT was able to engage the children and their families in a program of prevention. As a result, none of the children or their families who participated in the cholera prevention project became ill with the disease.

The management and staff of SHEFT were provided with on-going training and technical assistance in an effort to aide them in understanding the processes and procedures involved with managing the project. This effort was difficult to achieve, because there was a lack of understanding among the Albanian staff in managing an NGO and adapting to Western standards of management and administration. Along with this, there was no pool of management experience in Albania to draw from, nor were there social workers or youth workers with relevant field experience. They had no experience in maintaining adequate records or collecting and using data to evaluate the program activities. Early in the training of the staff it was evident that over four decades of isolation and autocratic rule, the Albanians were not very pliable in their learned behavior. Another factor that impacted management and staff training was the fact that there was not enough money within the USAID grant for more intensive training. Additional funds were raised through the European Union and from Childhope to underwrite the cost of bi-annual assistance in the areas of team building, management reporting and child care management. In spite of these ingrained difficulties, the staff and the management team did endeavor to provide the children at SHEFT with the best care and programming possible. As the staff became more confident in their work, they began to provide an extended series of services beyond the center. They made personal contact with the families of the children when the families sent their children back on the street to beg. They located the children who dropped out of the program, offering them contact with SHEFT, should they decide to return. The staff also spent time on the streets making contact with the growing numbers of new street children in Tirana.

Another issue which plagued the project was the almost non-existent support infrastructure in Albania. Banking and communications continued to be a problem from the beginning. Many times, project funds had to be hand-carried into Albania, because there were no banking systems in place to wire-transfer the money. Albanians were used to a "verbal cash" society. They were not familiar with institutional financial services. Communications in Albania were very primitive. The center had no telephone lines, so calls to staff had to go through a private line at someone's home. The same difficulties were involved in installing a fax and a computer.

Educational Program

The project introduced an innovative system of a continuing informal education program for up to 45 children, aged 5 to 13 years, at a time. Noting that the Albanian education system had very little resources, SHEFT became an independent learning center from the beginning of the project. The educational program consisted of bringing the children to the point where they acquired sufficient math and literacy skills to be reintroduced to the formal school system.

The success of the educational program is reflected in the fact that over 80% of the children who participated in the program went back to public school and were recognized as doing above-average work. The subjects covered in the SHEFT program included: math, literacy, cultural and ethnic activities, geography, history, as well as individual tutoring and mentoring. Field trips to parks and museums were also included in their recreational activities. After the children were sent to the public schools, the staff of SHEFT worked with the public schools to monitor the progress of the children and report any problems. There was a considerable amount of prejudice against street children, especially those who are Gypsies.

Some of the specific problems faced by the children when they started in the public schools, included:

- Harassment from other children
- Resistance from the families who wanted their children to continue to act as wage earners for the family
- Extra costs involved in finding money for uniforms, school books and transportation from the center to the schools (the public transport system in Tirana is not reliable)
- Disruption at home from some of the parents, which made doing home work difficult.

Another difficulty experienced within the education program was with the Gypsy families of the older girls who came into SHEFT for various services. It was not unusual for the families to force the girls to leave the program to be married. Girls as young as 12 or 13 were the most vulnerable to this practice. Some effort was made to persuade the parents to allow the girls to remain in the program for a longer period or to delay such an early marriage. Because of the strong Gypsy culture and the tradition of early marriage in the Gypsy community, this was not a successful effort of prevention.

Health Program

The children who come to SHEFT have experienced living conditions at the lowest level, both on the streets and at home. From anecdotal observations of the children and interviews, it was determined that all of the children had difficult and dismal health histories. The basic hygiene needs of the children were the first items to be considered within the program. SHEFT was able to improve the quality of life for the children in a number of ways. Most important, perhaps, was the availability of toilets, showers and healthy food cooked under sanitary conditions. The children's clothes were washed at the center also. In some situations, the children were given new clothes to wear. However, the new clothes were quickly sold in the market to get money for the families.

With good hygiene and healthy eating, the children's concentration span increased. This helped them in concentrating during their classes at the center. It also prevented common illnesses or other health problems, like lice.

SHEFT currently has a part-time pediatrician on-staff. The children's health is regularly monitored. They are taught health education and prevention of such diseases as tuberculosis, diphtheria, and polio. Practicing good hygiene and eating healthier diets is encouraged. The staff works as liaisons to the local hospital when children are seriously hurt or injured. Private donors have provided medical assistance and medical materials to SHEFT. Health records are being kept on each child who comes into SHEFT.

Dental problems are a serious concern for the children. Very few, if any, have had dental care or could afford to have it. The need for glasses is high among the children. Poor eye-sight is very common.

Many children on the street who have not come into SHEFT are served by the staff of the project, who go to the street to encounter the children. As best as they can, the staff attempts to provide the children with any medical assistance they might need and with meals, when possible. In the first three months of the outreach project, 20 street children were found to be in need of medical services. These children could not come to the center, because they needed to earn income. By coming to SHEFT, their earning potential dropped considerably. However, the outreach staff continued to provide them with immediate or emergency services on the street. The number of children on the street being assisted by SHEFT outreach workers has doubled since this service began.

SHEFT Facilities/The Center

Initially, the project was based in an unused half a state kindergarten in the center of the capital. This served the project well in its first and second developmental phases. The space was not large enough for recreational activities, nor was it air-conditioned, making it intolerable in the summer months.

SHEFT lost this space in 1995, when new legislation allowed the previous and rightful owner of the building and land to reclaim it. In 1996, SHEFT was able to locate to a more useable and larger space. The new premises was located at the side of an open market in Tirana. The facilities were a major improvement over the original site. There was more space available for the children's recreational activities, and it was away from traffic and other city pollutants.

The larger facility allowed for the addition of a night shelter for the children who were unable to return home. Some of the children came from abusive environments and needed time away from those situations. Twenty-four children live in the dormitories of SHEFT and receive support services on a 24-hour basis. About 75% of the children are there at the requests of their families. The other 25% are self-referred. These are usually children found sleeping in the streets or parks by the outreach workers.

(In the summer of 1997, SHEFT relocated again to another facility in Tirana, which will provide more space for additional children.)

CONCLUSIONS/UPDATES

SHEFT has been open since 1992. In spite of the initial difficulties and failed expectations, the project has remained viable and effective. SHEFT has attracted the resources and support of funders, such as: USAID, EU, UNDP, Soros Foundation, and various UK, Belgian and Italian organizations. More than 150 individual street children have used the services of the project. Just prior to the civil unrest in Tirana in early Spring, 100 children were coming into the SHEFT center or were being supported in the streets with food, clothing, health care and social activities through the street outreach program.

Other direct beneficiaries of the project include the families of the children, who depend on SHEFT for their children's health, education and nutritional needs. In addition, 10 staff members and their families depend on SHEFT for their jobs.

SHEFT has a high profile, not only in Albania, but within the media and among other development organizations. The center has regular visits from Albanian ministries, overseas government representatives and NGOs from abroad. The project has been profiled on television as well. Also, graduate students from Schools of Social Work use the program for their practicum (on-hand field experience).

Before the civil riots began in Albania early this Spring, there were almost no children begging on the streets of Tirana. SHEFT was directly responsible for this phenomenon. The children who would normally be on the street begging were at the SHEFT center or back in school.

The need for SHEFT and its services are becoming more evident with the current upheavals in Albania. In a recent report from the Director of SHEFT, a number of concerns were noted:

- The economic situation in Albania will continue to be severe. This problem will impact the situation of children in poor Albanian families, increasing the numbers of working children on the streets.
- A large rural migration into the cities is anticipated, as people look for work, even when the employment rate is very high in the formal work sector.
- With Tirana's population growing, there are more opportunities for out-of-school children to work. Menial jobs can be found in the market places, washing and guarding cars, shining shoes and selling small items on the streets.
- The streets are becoming more dangerous for street children. Prostitution, sexual exploitation by foreign pedophiles, the use of hard drugs and involvement in criminal activities are becoming real problems of these vulnerable children.
- There is a growing trade in the trafficking of children to Italy and Greece for the purpose of sexual exploitation and indentured labor.
- Finally, the problems facing any new government in Albania will not include an immediate concern for the situation of poor and vulnerable children.

Since the government will not be able to provide social welfare assistance to the growing numbers of street children and their families, programs like SHEFT become even more important as a provider of program services. Also, beside providing the children with basic services, SHEFT has been able to create a solid NGO in Tirana with a well-trained staff.

Also, a new development has presented itself to SHEFT. Working families whose children are in school have come to SHEFT, requesting that SHEFT provide recreational services for the children in the community at-large. The project is being seen as a part of the overall community. Not just a project for street children. The role of SHEFT might well be moving towards broader services for children.

With the obvious need for SHEFT so apparent, the next concern for its survival is to identify financial resources within Albania or the region as well as from continued funding from external sources, both governmental and non-governmental. Funding for SHEFT should be for a long-term commitment to the project, because the process of democratization and the building of a new government is starting all over again in Albania. Therefore, government resources will not be forthcoming in the near term.

Finally, it is important to note that SHEFT has been effective in providing essential services and protection to children who are outside of the normal prescription for development assistance. Without this project, many children in Tirana would have to return to difficult and unhealthy lives. Also, SHEFT is a sturdy and viable NGO in a country where many others have failed or given up. As well, SHEFT has impacted the community and its citizens through its programs for street children.

FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

As noted in the project report, several factors caused changes to the budget lines over the life of the grant. The original allocations were as follows:

<u>Cost Element</u>	<u>Yr. 1(1994/95)</u>	<u>Yr. 2(1995/96)</u>	<u>Yr. 3(1996/97)</u>	<u>Total</u>
Salaries/Benefits	\$ 8,620	\$ 9,913	\$ 11,400	\$29,933
Travel/Per Diems	2,100	2,415	2,777	7,292
Consultants	5,100	5,865	6,745	17,710
Supplies/Equipment	12,100	13,915	16,002	42,017
Communications	1,000	1,150	1,323	3,473
Education/Training	2,100	2,415	2,777	7,292
Other Direct Costs	5,300	2,990	4,150	12,440
TOTAL	\$ 36,320	\$ 38,663	\$ 45,174	<u>\$120,157**</u>

Under the terms of the agreement, Childhope was responsible for a cost share of \$20,157. These funds were raised by Childhope UK through a grant from the European Union in the amount of \$20,000. The remainder was provided by Childhope UK. The breakdown of the EU funds and Childhope UK was as follows:

<u>Cost Element</u>	<u>Childhope Cost Share</u>
Salaries and Benefits	\$ 2,000
Consultants	\$ 4,000
Supplies/Equipment	\$11,000
Education/Training	\$ 1,157
Other Direct Costs	\$ 2,000
TOTAL	<u>\$20,157**</u>

Because of the previous noted changes in the project report concerning the economy and the government's minimum salary levels, as well as the lower purchasing power of the dollar over the three years of the grant, the USAID funds were utilized primarily for salaries and benefits and supplies and equipment. The personnel costs increased approximately 10% each year, while the cost of supplies and equipment increased nearly 60% during the life of the grant. The cost of communications was less than anticipated, because there were few telephone lines available for phones, a FAX and a computer. By the final year of the grant, no USAID funds were being applied to the cost of consultants. All other budget items funded by the USAID grant were at a minimum level of expense.

It should also be noted that during the three year period of the grant, other funders, besides the EU, supported SHEFT. UNDP, the Soros Foundation, among others, provided funds that helped supplant the program activities.

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